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ABSTRACT

The increased movement of psychologists away from academic settings requires the integration of socially relevant activities into psychology graduate programs. It is important for students in practicum programs to get access to applied opportunities and to function ethically in those opportunities. Getting access has been achieved in several ways. Most graduate programs with practicum opportunities depend on a network of psychologists in the community to provide access and supervision. It is valuable for graduate programs to maintain a network of nonacademic psychologists who are qualified and willing to supervise graduate student practice in various work settings. Functioning ethically is somewhat more complicated. Psychologists must admit that all research, especially work in the field, is value-laden. If practicum experience is required of students, a variety of opportunities, permitting the expression of a variety of values, should be made available. Involvement in socially relevant class projects should be voluntary. Graduate students who go to work for an agency should explore the agency's value system before entering the practicum. Students and faculty should be made aware of the profession's ethical guidelines regarding their roles as researchers and as consultants. One advantage of having practica supervised by qualified psychologists is that, through role modeling and explicit discourse, the supervisor can help to develop an appropriate sense of ethics and professional integrity. (Author/NRB)

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PRACTICAL AND ETHICAL ASPECTS OF FIELD RESEARCH

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Abstract for ERIC

Practical and Ethical Aspects of Field Research
Carol M. Werner

The paper was presented as part of a larger symposium on integrating socially relevant activities into psychology graduate programs. Two specific issues were addressed: getting access to applied opportunities; and functioning ethically in those opportunities. Getting access has been achieved in several ways. The model that works best for our program is to maintain a network of nonacademic psychologists who are qualified and willing to supervise graduate student practica in various work settings. Functioning ethically is somewhat more complicated, and discussion addressed such issues as whether any research can be value free, mechanisms for assuring that involvement in socially relevant class projects be voluntary, and a review of some of the ethical guidelines for psychologists in consultant roles. One advantage of having practica supervised by qualified psychologists is that, through role modeling and explicit discourse, the supervisor can help to develop the appropriate sense of ethics and professional integrity.

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Practical and Ethical Aspects of Field Research

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I have been interested in the practical and ethical aspects of applied research for many years, and I am pleased to have an opportunity to discuss my concerns as part of this panel. I am going to limit my remarks to practicum opportunities as part of educational endeavors, and I will leave to others on the panel discussion of personal involvement in applied activities. The issues I will raise are not new, but with increased movement of psychologists away from academic settings for personal and professional purposes, I think there is a need to remind ourselves of the issues. The two main topics I have been asked to discuss are: getting access to applied opportunities; and functioning ethically in those opportunities.

As to the first issue: We know how to do it. Most graduate programs with practicum opportunities depend on a network of psychologists in the community to provide access and supervision (e.g. former students, friends in community settings, contacts through clinical practicum settings). At the undergraduate level, many departments have structured service or practicum opportunities which provide modest amounts of academic credit. Many social service systems have a central volunteer bureau through which students can gain entree. Often the network of practicum settings for Clinical Graduate students can yield a variety of nonclinical opportunities. Division 8 is developing a national network of social psychologists in nonacademic settings who are available to consult with and supervise predoctoral students. And graduate students often locate

their own opportunities in settings which interest them, however, often the supervision is not as good as when done by a known psychologist. Our graduate students sometimes complain that we don't have specific practicum opportunities to fit their particular interests. In my opinion, in many cases it's good for students to "be on their own" in this regard, since it can build their experience and confidence at locating and obtaining a job and career. In sum, through a combination of developing networks and student initiative, applied experiences are available.

What do students do when in these applied settings? This is where ethical issues arise, and my intent is to raise issues and only suggest a few specific guidelines. Let me first define advocacy as the use of special training and expertise in psychology for a particular goal. From the point of view of the educational institution, academic credit for participation should be based on the academic value of the experience. Students ought to have something to offer from the theory and method of psychology; simultaneously, students ought to gain educational benefit from the experience.

On the other hand, we need to struggle with the ethical questions of whether the special expertise gives the psychologist greater power than s/he would have as a naive citizen, and whether this power is being used ethically. The same individual who would be horrified by the use of social psychologically based persuasion tricks in commercial advertising would often not bat an eye if the same technique were applied to increasing campaign contributions to a favored political candidate. I doubt that one can find any public issue which does not have opponents. Personal values and attitudes do not assure us of the rightness of

particular advocacies, and values can blind even the most honorable of us to opposing points of view. At a minimum, psychologists must admit that all research, especially work in the field is value-laden, and that not everyone may agree with their goals..

Especially when students participate off-campus as part of a course or program requirement, faculty must recognize the special and powerful relationship they have to students. Undergraduate students must be free to choose whether and how much to participate in course-related projects, and--if practicum experience is an essential part of the academic goals of a course--a variety of opportunities, permitting the expression of a variety of values, ought to be made available. Graduate students who go to work for an agency ought to explore the agency's value system before entering the practicum. For example, one of our students worked as a program evaluator for a public intoxication project. Her initial impression was that the project was aimed at helping public intoxicants reassimilate into society; she decided later that a more accurate description of the project's goal was to get the intoxicants out of public places where they offended the citizenry, and if possible, to get them to move to another city.

Students and faculty should be made aware of the profession's ethical guidelines regarding our roles as researchers and as consultants. APA has a booklet on research ethics that everyone in the research organization should read. Also, Stuart Cook (1976) has provided an excellent chapter on research ethics, with special consideration given to field research. I don't have time to

summarize his entire piece, however, I would like to draw your attention to two issues: First, he points out that permission from an agency, organization or corporation to conduct research does not imply the consent of potential participants--and, in particular, he implied that value differences would underlie the resistance to participate: "It may be the case, however, that the potential participants are not in sympathy with the research objectives and would not take part if allowed to decide for themselves. The worker in the factory may see productivity research as a step toward greater exploitation, and the prisoner may feel that society, not he, needs changing" (p. 206). Second, Cook challenged the researcher's right to effect changes in participants <u>without their explicit knowledge and consent</u>. "As yet, little concern has been shown regarding the implications of violating the research participant's right to self-determination. The principal reason for this is that social science has only begun to learn how to change people in ways that are fundamental to their conduct and outlook" (p. 221). My point is: don't assume that everyone agrees with your goals.

The non-research related guidelines have been developed primarily for clinical and consulting psychologists, but have much to say to applied researchers as well. Individuals cannot function outside the bounds of their professional competency and training; information gained in consultation with individuals must be held in confidence; individuals cannot suppress or distort information gained during their consultation; and so on. (Incidentally, I

deliberately avoided using the term "psychologists" in those examples because in most States, individuals cannot call themselves psychologists unless licensed). In other words, professional integrity requires that we be aware of and adhere to many ethical guidelines. Indeed, one of the main reasons for insisting that student practica be supervised by trusted professionals is to assure that these ethical guidelines are not violated. Still, working for an agency does not absolve one of individual ethical responsibility. Indeed, agencies have been known to put students into positions which violate ethical principles (e.g. use of title "Dr." by predoctoral students; interviewing people in quasi-clinical way without proper clinical training; being preasured into violating confidences in exchange for special favors). It is clear to me that students should not be placed in community settings without adequate ethical preparation and appropriate supervision.

In summary, it appears to me that any kind of application of psychology can be seen as advocacy. Admitting that this is the case enables us to articulate personal goals as well as to anticipate opposing points of view. Students must be informed of underlying biases, and--if necessary--be given alternative opportunities congruent with their own value system. Professional ethics must be conveyed to students through coursework, discussion, and role-modeling. These guidelines are particularly important when faculty and students are involved under the auspices of an educational institution.

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